



LANL sets TRU waste hauling record

October 4, 2011

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, October 4, 2011—Los Alamos National Laboratory has set a new LANL record for the amount of transuranic (TRU) waste from past nuclear operations shipped in a single year to the U.S. Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, NM. In fact, the Laboratory has shipped record numbers of transuranic waste each of the past three years.

The Laboratory's TRU Waste Program completed 171 shipments in the past fiscal year, between October 2010 and September 2011, breaking last year's record of 158. The Lab has ramped up its waste disposal effort and has transported more than 450 shipments safely to WIPP since 2009.

"Transporting TRU waste off the Laboratory is a high priority for Governor Martinez and the State of New Mexico," said George Rael, assistant manager for environmental operations at the National Nuclear Security Administration's Los Alamos Site Office. "This achievement is very important for the Laboratory, NNSA, and the community," he said.

TRU waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, debris, soil, and other items contaminated with radioactive elements, mostly plutonium. Each of these man-made elements has an atomic number greater than that of uranium, thus they are labeled transuranic, for "beyond uranium" on the periodic table of the elements. Waste is packaged primarily in drums or fiberglass-reinforced boxes, which are then typically placed in a large, steel shipping container called a TRUPACT-II.

LANL has about 9,500 TRU waste containers remaining above ground and about 5,000 retrievably buried underground at Technical Area 54, Area G. Much of the waste is legacy waste—material left over from Cold War-era operations.

The New Mexico Environment Department has listed continued acceleration of TRU waste shipments from the Laboratory to WIPP as one of its top environmental priorities. Michael Graham, associate director of environmental programs at LANL, said the Laboratory never lost its focus on this priority, even during the recent Las Conchas forest fire, which resulted in a weeklong lab closure and evacuation of the Los Alamos community. "We had a shipment on the road the day the Lab reopened. Setting this record for waste shipments is a result of many people coming together as a team to focus on getting this material disposed of safely."

The Laboratory has shipped record numbers of transuranic waste each of the past three years.

"Our crews worked diligently to ship this waste," said Kathryn Johns-Hughes, TRU waste program director, "and we plan to break this record next year."

Cleanup and disposal of Cold War-era waste is funded by DOE's Office of Environmental Management.

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